

## Christmas Time in Hawkins by ObeyDontStray

**Category:** Stranger Things - Fandom

**Genre:** A lil bit of nsfw, Christmas Fluff, Happy New Years too, Multi, merry christmas ya'll, the fluffiest of fluff

**Language:** English

**Characters:** Callahan, Dustin Henderson, Eleven, Flo - Character, Jim "Chief" Hopper, Jonathan Byers, Joyce Byers, Lucas Sinclair, Mike Wheeler, Powell, Will Byers

**Relationships:** Joyce Byers/Jim "Chief" Hopper

**Status:** Completed

**Published:** 2016-12-04

**Updated:** 2016-12-31

**Packaged:** 2022-04-02 00:20:46

**Rating:** Explicit

**Warnings:** No Archive Warnings Apply

**Chapters:** 26

**Words:** 20,713

**Publisher:** archiveofourown.org

**Summary:**

Written from a advent prompt list on Tumblr by justablobfish. A collection of Hopper/Byers family Christmas shorts. Bonus New Years Eve chapter :)

## 1. Winter Expectation vs Winter Reality

### Summary for the Chapter:

Jim hates Christmas, but it's impossible to be grumpy when Will drops a little truth on him.

Jim was complaining about the weather being so nasty when Joyce brought it up.

"Hey Will, wasn't there something you were going to tell the Chief?" Joyce asked over dinner, causing Jim to raise his eyebrows.

"No." Will said bashfully as he pushed his mashed potatoes around on his plate with his fork.

"C'mon you were really excited about it last night. You should tell him."

"You're embarrassing him, Mom." Jonathan chimed in.

"The guys teased me about it already." Will admitted.

"I thought it was a pretty noble thing, myself." Joyce told him.

"Is someone gonna clue me in here?" Jim asked before taking a bite of food.

"I want to be a cop. You know, when I'm older." Will confessed. "Like you." He added in a much smaller voice.

Jim grinned at the small boy. "A fine occupational choice, if I do say so myself. You'll make a good cop. Flo is forcing me to ride in the Christmas parade tomorrow, if you wanna go with me. I'll make you an honorary deputy."

Will smiled broadly. "That would be really cool, Chief."

"Joyce, Jonathan, you guys want to ride with me too?" Jim asked.

"I told Nancy I'd watch the parade with her and Steve." Jonathan

replied.

"I have to work. But I'll take my smoke break in time to see you guys." Joyce added.

.

The next morning Will sat on the porch steps, waiting for Jim. "You're late." He teased when he climbed into the warm cab.

"You sound like Flo already. I had to run an errand." Jim replied, passing Will a box. "You'll need this if you're going to riding around with me all day."

Will opened the box to find a brown Stetson hat just like Jim's. He grinned from ear to ear as he put it on. "Thanks Chief!"

"No sweat kid. Early Christmas present. Every man needs a good hat." He said as he pulled from the driveway and headed for the parade, reaching for his cup of coffee in the center console.

.

Jim pulled his Blazer in line behind the Hawkins High marching band. "Looks like we got a couple of minutes to burn, kiddo." Jim observed. Will picked up his sketchbook and produced a pencil from over his ear. "I'm glad you want to be a cop, but never stop drawing, okay?" Jim stated.

Will frowned. "I get picked on at school because I draw."

"They're just jealous of your talent." Jim commented. "Kids are mean. Just know you're better than all that."

"They tease me because I'm not a tough guy."

"You're the toughest guy I know, Will Byers. You made it out of the Upside Down. That's pretty tough." Will bit his lip as he continued sketching a snowman. Jim reached across the cab and grabbed his shoulder. "I mean it. You and your Mom and Jon are the strongest

people I know." He commented before taking a drink of his coffee.

"I wish you were my Dad, Chief."

Jim nearly choked on his coffee. He took a second to swallow and think before answering. He felt his heart in his throat, threatening to strangle him. He never wanted to be a father again but he'd caught himself more than once what it'd be like if Will and Jonathan were his. Those boys deserved better than Lonnie Byers. "I'll always be here for you, kid." Was the best he could muster.

The parade began moving and Will closed his sketchbook, tucking his pencil over his ear under his hat.

"Alright kid, put on a happy face and wave. Wish people Merry Christmas." Will was already smiling.

·  
"There's Mom!" Will chimed, pointing across Hop to Donald's store. He leaned over the bigger man's side of the truck and they both waved frantically to her. She smiled at them and waved back. She mouthed 'I love you' at the two of them.

Will moved back to his side of the truck and waved heartily at the bystanders, yelling Merry Christmas out of his window into the cold December air. He could see his breath in the air but he didn't care. The Chief's truck is warm, his new hat made him feel braver already, and things felt warm for the first time since the Chief and Mom rescued him. "Hey Jonathan! Hey Nancy! Hey Steve!" He called out of his window to the trio, waving.

Will settled back into his seat, waving at others. "Hey Will, flip this lever right here." Jim requested, pointing at a lever in the dash. Will flipped it and the lights and siren came to life. Just when Jim thought it impossible, Will's smile got bigger. "Alright, cut it off. We just wanna show off, not deafen everyone." He said, giving Will a half grin.

"Can I use the cb?" Will asked excitedly.

"Wanna tell everyone at the station Merry Christmas?"

"What can my cb name be? I need a handle."

Jim rubbed his chin for a moment, thinking. "Clash. After that song you like." He picked up the cb and clicked the button. "This here's the Midnight Rider and I've got a special guest here with a message for the whole station. Come in, over."

Flo picked up on the other side, answering with her handle, which she rarely did. "This is Mama Bird. Go ahead, Midnight Rider."

Jim passed the mic over to Will. "This is Clash, and I want to wish the whole station Merry Christmas!"

Jim could hear the smile in Flo's voice when she answered. "Thank you Clash! Merry Christmas to you!"

.

Jim took Will back to the station with him and kept Will's mug full of hot chocolate while he did paperwork. Will played hearts with Callahan and Powell and helped Flo decorate the station. The duo finally made it home for dinner around dark. Will bounded in the house before him, excited to tell Joyce all about his day.

"Nice hat." She complimented as she hugged him, glancing over him to Jim.

"Every man needs a good hat!" He echoed Jim's statement from earlier. "Chief let me do the siren and the lights! And use the cb. I have my own handle now, it's Clash! And I hung out at the station and played cards and decorated the office and drank hot chocolate!"

"Very exciting!" Joyce grinned as she held his shoulders. "Still wanna be a police officer?"

"Of course!" He said before rushing into the kitchen with his sketchbook under his arm.

Joyce wrapped her arms around Jim, tucking her hands into his back

pockets and looking up at him. "You made his whole year, babe."

"He made mine, to be honest. Well, besides dinner with you." He leaned down to kiss her.

"Are you getting into the Christmas spirit? Just a little bit?" She asked and he gave her a smile.

"You and Will are going to make sure of it, aren't you?"

"Yep!"

## **2. We Need to Buy You Winter Clothes**

### **Summary for the Chapter:**

Joyce shops and Jim's a typical man.

It was a cold night when she popped back into their lives. When Hopper brought Eleven to Joyce's home, she was dwarfed in his giant bomber jacket. Her knobby knees were red with cold beneath the hem of the ragged pink dress. He'd given her his brown Stetson to keep her head warm too. Joyce had to stifle a laugh at the tiny Hopper in front of her.

The man himself was barely dressed for the snowy weather. He'd found Eleven wandering in the woods and immediately shed every item of clothing he could to keep her warm. Joyce brushed the snowflakes from the shoulders of his uniform and from his beard before turning her attention back to Eleven. "How about we clean you up and get you into some fleece pajamas? They'll probably be a little big on you, but I think you can wear them. Jim you're staying the night with us."

"What will the boys think?" He asked.

"It's too snowy and too late for you to go home." She replied, skipping his question entirely.

"Eleven sweetheart, how about a warm bath?"

Eleven's eyes widened in fear at the mention of a bath.

"No honey! Not like that! A bath, like to get clean? Warm water. It'll feel good, I promise." She turned to Jim. "There's a change of clothes for you in the top right drawer of my dresser."

"I have my own drawer now?" He grinned.

"C'mon Eleven, let's go warm up." She told the girl as she lead her by the hand to the bathroom, completely ignoring his statement.

He grinned as he set about making a cup of coffee, desperate to warm

his hands and his belly.

.

The next morning Eleven sat wide eyed in the back seat of Jim's Blazer. While the boys were in school, Jim and Joyce elected to take Eleven a couple of towns over to shop for warm clothes.

He rolled his eyes as Joyce picked through every piece of clothing in the girls department.

"Well I don't exactly know her size, Hop." Joyce commented when he protested. She held a coat up to Eleven's chest, comparing it's size to her.

"Don't the sizes go by age?" He asked, earning a snort from Joyce.

"Do your clothes? Only little kids clothing go by age. Like infants through toddlers."

"It's seriously not this hard to buy clothes. All this stuff looks the same, just different colors. Grab an armload and lets go. I'm hungry." Joyce rolled her eyes at him. Typical man.

"She doesn't just need winter clothes. We have to buy her underwear and bras and socks too."

He pressed a wad of money into Joyce's hand. "I'm going to automotive. Then I'll be outside waiting."

.

Joyce tapped on the window and startled him from his afternoon nap behind the wheel of the Blazer. She opened the back door and helped Eleven load the bags into the backseat. "Don't you know better than to nap with the doors unlocked?" She fussed.

He reached over and turned down the George Jones playing on the radio. "You know if someone kidnapped me, they'd just bring me back." He joked.

With everyone loaded up, he glanced at El in the backseat. "Are we



all outfitted now?" Joyce answered yes.

"Can we go get something to eat now?" He asked.

"Yes!" Eleven answered enthusiastically from the backseat.

### **3. Treatment for the Flu**

#### **Summary for the Chapter:**

The entire Byers household is sick. Jim Hopper to the rescue.

Jonathan was the first to get it. Then Eleven, who was terrified of the changes in her own body. Then Will.

When Joyce heard the knock she audibly groaned. "Come in." She called an at the sight of Hopper she threw her hands up to ward him off. "You might not want to come in here. Everyone is contagious but me."

He took one look at the very pale and very sick Eleven on the couch before taking off his coat and coming inside. "What's going on?"

"The flu. Both boys and Eleven have it. I was just about to make a batch of chicken soup if you'd like some." She volunteered before she turned and sneezed into her sleeve, sniffing.

"Joyce honey, you're sick too."

"No I'm not. Just feeling a little under the weather."

"You're white as a sheet honey. Take a load off for a little while, okay?"

"Jim you're going to get sick if you hang around here."

"Just let me worry about that, will you?" He said guiding her to the armchair and gently pushing her into it, pulling the blanket from the back of it and spreading it over her. His hand gently lingered on her forehead. "You're burning up. You've been so busy tending to everyone else you neglected yourself. As usual."

Jim kicked off his shoes and tread into the kitchen, easily finding the big cans of chicken soup in the cabinet. When he glanced back into the living room Joyce was asleep and Eleven was watching tv with rapt attention.

Later he set the table and dispersed bowls of soup and hot tea before calling the entire family to the table. He stole the footstool from the living room for El to sit on. Everyone sported long, pale faces. Will sat with his comforter wrapped around him. Jonathan's hair was all disheveled and he looked like he'd aged about ten years, sitting at the table in long sleeves. Eleven sat with her hands around the warm bowl, desperate to warm her hands. And Joyce, like Will, sat with the blanket wrapped around her shoulders.

"I don't know if I can eat." Jonathan commented.

"Just try, please baby." Joyce commented.

Jim stood and made his way to the pantry before setting the box of saltine crackers in the middle of the table. "Might wanna try your luck with those first."

Will took a slurp of his soup first, testing it out.

"C'mon it's can soup. My cooking's not that bad." Jim teased, trying to get a smile out of anyone at the table.

El rubbed her throat. "It hurts."

"I'm sorry sweetie." Joyce tried her best to comfort her, reaching over to grab her hand. "After dinner we'll all gargle salt water. It'll help with the sore throat."

.

Joyce ended up in the bathroom after eating and Jim held her hair as she threw up, leaving the boys to teach El how to do the unpleasant task of gargling warm salt water. When Joyce settled back against the sink Jim passed her a cool washcloth to wash her face. "Why don't I fix you a hot toddy and go to bed sweetheart? Sweat out that fever."

"Whiskey isn't the answer to everything Jim."

"It is for a lot of things. If you drink a toddy every night, you'll be over this quicker. I'll spend the night and watch over the kids."

Joyce managed to stand and brush her teeth, ridding herself of the nasty taste in her mouth.

"Go to bed, I'll bring you a toddy and the trash can just in case." He offered.

.

With Joyce in bed and tended to, he pulled Jonathan's mattress off his bed and tugged it into the living room in front of the tv. All three kids stretched out sideways on it with Will in the middle to watch the Twilight Zone. Jim settled into the couch with a tumbler of whiskey to watch it with them. This wouldn't be the first night he'd spent sleeping on a couch.

## 4. The Right Mood

### Summary for the Chapter:

Joyce spends a little too much time decorating the tree.

Getting the person who doesn't like Christmas into the right festive mood

-----

After searching through live Christmas trees for two hours Joyce finally picked out her 'perfect' tree. And after much effort Jim got it into her house and into its stand in the corner.

"Wanna help me decorate it? I asked the kids but they ran off to the Wheeler's."

"You know I'm not into Christmas babe. I did the grunt work, you can decorate." He said, picking up the remote and turning to a football game.

"It's like Christmas law. Whoever's in the living room has to help." She stated with her hands on her hips.

"Well, I'm a lawbreaker." "You're a cop!" She said, offended. "That means I can break a law or two once in a while." He said, giving her a wink.

Jim watched his football game, a beer in hand, but his eyes kept drifting to Joyce. She kept sliding against the wall as she wrapped the tree in colorful blinking lights. Then he'd catch glimpses of the smooth skin beneath her shirt whenever she'd stand on her tiptoes to place a bulb up high. How she'd bend low to put them at the bottom. He made a conscious effort to go back to his game.

"I'm not tall enough to put the star on top, Hop."

"How do you normally do it?"

"I stand on a chair usually. But you're tall as the tree. Put it up there,

please?" She asked as she passed him the star.

"I've got a better idea." He said passing it back to her and standing. Before she could protest he took her by the hips and lifted her into the air effortlessly for her to place the star.

When he set her back on her feet his hands wandered to her belly as he gently bit the shell of her ear. "Are you done yet? I'd very much like to pay attention to something other than Christmas."

"Is that all you think about, Hop?" She teased, leaning back into his embrace.

"I hate to admit that I'm jealous of a Christmas tree, but you've been paying it too much attention."

With a smirk Joyce grabbed a bag from by the tree and pushed Jim back towards the couch. When it caught the back of his legs he sunk into it and she straddled his lap. "Whatcha got in mind, baby?"

"Well you did say you were jealous of my Christmas tree."

"Yeah-

She reached into the small bag and produced a piece of green tinsel. "What's your game here, lady?" He asked with an eyebrow raised.

She started by tucking the strand over his ear and running it along his jaw to his other ear. Then she dug a few small ornaments out of the bag and hung them on the tinsel.

"There, now I've decorated you too."

"You're a goof, Joyce."

"Hold still, let me get my camera!" She teased as she jumped up and ran for the kitchen, where she kept her camera on top of the fridge.

He give her his best grumpy look when she aimed the camera at him. "Smile for me, Chief."

"No."

"Smile for me or I'm showing this picture to everyone in the department."

"You'll do that anyway." He grumbled.

"Smile or I'll give you a bag of coal for Christmas!"

"That was such a lame threat, Joyce." He said but he gave her a half smile anyway and she quickly snapped her photo. "Come here, you." He commented, grabbing her hips and pulling her to straddle him again. "You're a Christmas monster, ma'am."

"And you're the Grinch, but something's gotta make your heart grow three times larger."

He framed her face and kissed her, tinsel face and all. "You already did, sweetheart."

## 5. Snowball Fight

### Summary for the Chapter:

Things are a little slow at the Police Department

"Well that was a waste of time." Jim commented as the he and his deputies stepped from his truck. The call sounded serious when it came in, but the call had ended up just being a few kids fighting in the high school. Hopper had broken it up easily on his own. Had he known it was that easy, he would have sent Powell and Callahan alone to solve it and stayed in his warm office, undisturbed. Powell walked ahead in the group as the three of them chose their steps carefully on the snowy ground. A streak of white whizzed past in Jim's peripheral vision and Powell stumbled.

The normally quiet one of the group, Powell grabbed the wet spot on the back of his head and cursed under his breath. "Callahan you idiot!" He bent down and scooped up his own handful of snow, balling it and throwing it at the younger of the three of them.

"What are you guys? Three?" Jim bellowed just before an errant snowball smacked him in the chest. "Aren't we a little old for this shit?"

Callahan took cover behind his car, tossing snowballs over it. Powell hid behind the Blazer, leaving Jim in the open to be pelted by the blindly flung snowballs. "I'm so firing both of you!" He shouted as he looked around for any sort of cover.

As he strode over to the door of the station Flo stood behind it. When he reached for the door handle she made a show of locking him out as the deputies pelted his back with snowballs. "This is mutiny, Flo! You traitor!" He taunted as he tried the door just for good measure. She smiled and raised her coffee mug to him. When he tried to open it with his key, she promptly locked it again with a smile. When his cold hands managed to drop the keys he bent down and pocketed them, quickly forming two snowballs and placing them out of sight.

Jim turned his back to the station and crossed his arms over his chest



as the deputies continued to pelt him with snow. When a snowball nailed him in the face, his body language grew stern. "Alright, that's enough!" He barked, his voice echoing around the neighborhood. Both men stood with their hands in the air.

"Sorry Chief!"

"Sorry!"

Jim took the opportunity to nail both men in their faces with the snow balls he'd secretly formed. With both of them stunned he turned to the door and gave Flo a death glare. With a smirk she allowed him in.

"I wasn't going to let you in till you played a little." She stated.

"I think I won." He said, shrugging out of his soaking wet jacket.

### **Notes for the Chapter:**

i hope this is a pretty good discription of a snowball fight. See here in SC, we don't get enough snow for such things lol

## 6. Hot Coffee and Cozy Sweaters

### Summary for the Chapter:

Joyce and Jim share a quiet morning together.

"Why are we out here when there's a warm house, right here?" Joyce grumbled as she shrunk into the rocking chair, pulling up the hood on Jim's department hoodie she'd stolen. He passed her a mug of coffee and she held into it like a lifeline, trying to warm her hands on the porcelain cup. Her toes curled in her pink fuzzy slippers, frozen.

"We always drink our coffee on the porch in the morning." He protested, flexing his bare feet on the wooden porch.

"We're both going to end up sick. Especially with you being barefoot." He shrugged and took a sip of coffee with one hand, reaching from his chair to take her hand.

"It's not that cold out here."

"Jim, there's snow on the ground!"

He grinned at her. "Yeah. But I like to sit out here for that." He said pointing to the edge of the property where a few dogs stood with their faces to the ground, hunting for food.

"We could see them from inside the house, you know." She grumbled quietly.

"Go in the house then. I'll sit out here by myself."

Joyce stood from her chair and stood in front of him, taking his cup from him and crawling into his lap, resting her head against his chest.

They stayed silent, with her listening to the beat of his heart, as they watched a few bucks join the dogs and walk quietly through the snow. His hand wandered her back and she enjoyed the warmth through his stolen hoodie. No matter the circumstances, he was always warm to the touch. Warm and soft. Unlike her bony knees and

elbows and perpetually cold feet and hands.

She slid her hands under his flannel and against his henley clad sides to warm them. His slid his under the back of the hoodie to smooth the soft skin of her back, the sudden warmth making her skin prickle. "I love you, Joyce."

She leaned in close and kissed him sweetly. "I love you too, Jim."

**Notes for the Chapter:**

i dunno why this one took so long to write. Sorry it's so short!

## 7. Hints

### Summary for the Chapter:

Jim figures out what to buy Joyce for Christmas

Giving subtle hints of what one would like to get for Christmas  
(Okay so it's not so subtle I guess?)  
-----

It all started in Donald's store. Joyce grabbed Jim by the hand and dragged him through the store. "You've got to see what I stocked today!"

Jim was not as impressed by the stock of giant teddy bears as she was, but he enjoyed the sheer joy on her face. The bears were almost as big as she was, and the picture made him smile as she jumped into and sank into the bin of bears, almost disappearing in the fluff.

"I wanted to do this all day when I was pricing and stocking them." She admitted, sinking further into the bin.

"Why don't you get yourself one?" He asked taking her hand and helping her out of the bin.

"Please! These things are expensive! Besides, a grown woman doesn't need a giant teddy bear." She grabbed one of the white bears and hugged it close. "But I do wish they had these when I was little. Imagine Santa leaving one of these by the Christmas tree."

.

Jim could hear Jonathan's voice in the living room, it sounded urgent. When he rounded the corner into the room he spotted Jonathan crouched in front of the couch where Joyce sat. Jonathan had both of her hands in his own and he was encouraging her to breathe in and out with him.

"What's going on?" Jim asked as he sank into the couch beside her.

"Panic attack." Jon replied quietly, releasing Joyce's hands and giving

her a pillow from the couch. "Do you need anything Mom?"

She shook her head and buried her face in the pillow, breathing in and out deeply. Jim reached over and placed a warm hand on her back, hoping the gesture was more soothing than crowding. She turned to him and buried her face in his chest instead of the pillow. "It's okay baby. You'll make it through this." He encouraged, still smoothing her back. Her whole body shook in his embrace.

She let him go and reached for Jonathan, hugging him too. "Thank you Jonathan."

"Anytime Mom."

.

"Are those normal for her?" Jim asked Jonathan in the kitchen later after Joyce began feeling better.

"She has them once in a while. That was a little one. Tomorrow's inventory day at work, so she's a little stressed. Will has them occasionally too."

"Did I do okay? What should I do if they start panicking around me?" Jim asked, taking a seat at the kitchen table and motioning for Jon to sit with him.

"Just encourage them to breathe in and out deeply. Let them know it's only temporary and they're doing great. Mom clings to things. Pillows, people, blankets. Will doesn't like for people to touch him when he's panicking. He says he feels like he's suffocating."

"Your Mom's a hugger even if she isn't panicking." Jim joked. "But I'm okay with that."

.

In bed Joyce drew him closer and cuddled against his side. "You feeling better sweetheart?" He asked, planting a kiss to the top of her head. She nodded against his arm. "You ever have those when no one's around? I imagine that's pretty scary."

"Sometimes. It helps if I have something to hold onto. I feel like I'm coming apart most of the time."

Jim's hand wandered her thigh. "I'm sorry those things happen to you, baby. You know if you need me, I'm here."

She wrapped her arms around him tightly, kissing the pulse point at his neck. "You're like a giant teddy bear, Jim." She teased.

"Well if I can make you smile like those bears in the store did, that's a good thing." He grinned in the darkness. He made up his mind then to buy her one for Christmas. He'd have to get it a giant bow and leave it next to the tree for her on Christmas night.

### **Notes for the Chapter:**

A little self indulgent, since I just recently had a few panic attacks. And I love giant stuffed things too. And soft, squishy people that care about others.

## 8. Decoration Wars

### Summary for the Chapter:

The kids plan a surprise for Joyce with Hop's help.

It was a little unusual was all. Will, Jonathan, and Eleven sat at the kitchen table in Jim's trailer, the contents of Joyce's craft box spread out on the table in front of them. Jim had been more than a little surprised when Jonathan cornered him at the station to ask if the kids could make something for Joyce at Jim's house. Though he rarely spent time at home anymore, Jim agreed.

While Jim was fiddling with the radio dials to find Christmas music, Will was teaching El the fine art of how to trace, cutout, and paint her handprint to make a reindeer. He filled them on the fact that Joyce had kept all the ornaments he and Jonathan made over the years and still hung them on the tree. Every year it was tradition to make a new one for her. And that this year, El had to make one and surprise Joyce with it. Jim had noticed pretty much every ornament on her tree had been homemade.

"You should make one too, Chief."

Before he could really think about it, Jim laughed. "I'm not the crafting type, kid."

"C'mon it's not hard. And Mom would love to get an ornament from everyone in the family." Jonathan said, defending Will's case.

Jim's eyebrows raised. "I'm not really part of the family-"

"Yes you are." Both boys chimed before turning to laugh at each other. "Jinx. You owe me a soda!" Will laughed.

"My hand's too big for one of those reindeer deals." Jim said, looking down at his hand as if to make sure.

"Pipe cleaner ornaments are the easiest. Sit down, I'll show you." Jonathan said, gesturing to the chair next to him with a nod. Jonathan told him to take a red and a white pipe cleaner and twist

them together like a candy cane. "That's it. Now just make a shape with it. Like a star or something." Jonathan instructed.

Jim went with a candy cane shape but felt it too plain. He remembered the years he'd helped Sarah make ornaments, she'd always been so good at it. Shamefully, some of them were still packed away with the rest of her things in his closet. He glanced at the blue hair tie on his wrist and felt his heart in his throat again. Trying to distract himself he fidgeted with a bag of beads from the box.

"You can add beads or something, if you wanna get fancy." Jonathan teased and Jim straightened to pipe cleaners out, untwisting them. He took just the red one and began stringing multicolored beads on it. Now unable to bend it in any fancy shapes he went with the easiest, a heart. Jonathan made a face at him and rolled his eyes.

"Honestly, nothing should surprise you anymore kid. I like your Mom, okay?" Jim quipped and Jonathan quickly passed him a red ribbon and quietly told him to tie a loop so it could be hung on the tree.

In the end Will produced several little boxes to hold their ornaments individually. "That way Mom gets the most presents!" Will beamed at his idea. El's reindeer looked nice. As did the clothespin angel Will had made and the popsicle stick snowman Jonathan had made. Jim felt a little self conscious packing his up and nearly wrote 'From Will' on the tag on his. Honestly a grown man, making heart shaped ornaments.

"I'm betting Mom will cry."

"Mom cries every year when she opens our ornaments." Jonathan shot back.

"Yeah but she's getting four this year. Double last year!"

.

Will took a pipe cleaner and as stealthily as he could, poked Jonathan in the ear with it.



"Why you little!" Jonathan grabbed a handful of red and green pop-poms and threw them at his little brother, accidentally getting El in the cross fire.

All three kids broke into a fit of giggles as the threw crafting supplies across the table at each other. Pom-poms, googly eyes, pipe cleaners, and cotton balls. When El threw a handful of gold glitter at Will, Jim cleared his throat rather forcefully. She stopped and looked at the man with wide eyes, as did the two boys.

"I know this isn't the cleanest place in the world but c'mon guys. Time to clean up my kitchen." All three kids hung their heads as they got up from the table, beginning to move about.

Despite the mess, Jim was glad to see the kids having such a good time. Even if it did mean he'd be seeing gold glitter for the rest of his life.

## 9. Sleigh Ride

### Summary for the Chapter:

Date night isn't what Joyce expected.

"My feet are frozen!" Jim complained as he walked along main street with Joyce, her arm looped through his. He took a drag off his cigarette before passing it to her.

"The lights are pretty though, aren't they?" Joyce said enthusiastically. "Who decorated the station, you?" He snorted in response.

"I put Powell and Callahan on the case as punishment for pelting me with snowballs."

She giggled, recalling the story he'd told her of the station snowball fight. "I wish I could've been there to see that!"

He stuck his cold, bare hand to the side of her exposed neck. "It felt a little like that!" She shivered and moved to protect her neck from him, squeaking in surprise.

After walking on in silence, Joyce piped up. "I thought we were headed to the theater." She said, realizing they were walking in the opposite direction, far from where he'd parked the truck.

"Changed my mind." He admitted, finally slipping on his gloves. His fingers were so cold they stung. He pulled her into the coffee shop where the waitress fixed him two steaming cups of peppermint cocoa. The couple wrapped their hands around the cups, thankful for the warmth in their hands. They lingered inside the shop, listening to Christmas music and sipping their cocoa. Once they finished he took her by the hand and lead her outside again.

Joyce gasped as he eyes fell on the brilliant red sleigh and the black as coal horses in front of it. Seeing her smile, Jim lead her over to it. The driver smiled, recognizing Jim, and welcoming them into his

sleigh. "Ever been on a sleigh ride?" Jim asked as he helped her onto the bench seat and laced his gloved fingers with hers.

"No. I've always been too busy." He shot her a lopsided grin, secretly glad she hadn't.

The sleigh lurched forward into motion and headed for the park. Around them people ice skated, couples all bundled up and holding hands, and children sledding down the hill. In the gazebo a small group of musicians played Christmas carols. The horses lead them over the icicle laden bridge, where fish swam under the frozen surface of the pond.

"This is beautiful!" Joyce said, turning her attention to Jim and prompt catching him staring at her. "What?"

"Not as beautiful as you." He said, giving her a broad smile. His dimples made her feel weak and she tightened her grip on his hand.

"Jim Hopper, you old romantic you."

He was still smiling as he pressed his warm lips to hers.

When she pulled away snowflakes began gathering in his beard and hair, sticking to the shoulders of his bomber jacket. He kissed her nose, red with cold, before wrapping an arm around her shoulders.

The sleigh took them on a tour of part of the neighborhood, full of decorated houses. Joyce leaned into his side as they watched the colored lights pass by, lighting up the pathway of snow that that the horses walked.

At Jim's request, the driver let them off near Jim's truck. He thanked the man heartily and paid him before he stepped off the sleigh, taking Joyce's hand and helping her. Guiding her to the passenger side with his hand on the small of her back, Jim pressed her against the door. "Did you enjoy your first sleigh ride?"

"I did!" She beamed up at him. He took her face in both hands and when she closed her eyes to savor the warmth of his hands, he kissed the snowflakes from her eyelashes. His kisses trailed to her nose then down to the corner of her mouth, where he kissed her tenderly. She

leaned forward into his body and moved to kiss his lips, generating warmth between the two of them.

In that moment only the two of them existed, like a scene in a snow globe.

## 10. Reading Christmas Stories

### Summary for the Chapter:

Who knew Hop could be such a softie?

### Notes for the Chapter:

Full credit to Dr. Suess for The Grinch!

"Every Who down in Whoville liked Christmas a lot. But the Grinch, who lived just north of Whoville did not! The Grinch hated Christmas! The whole Christmas season! Now, please don't ask why. No one quite knows the reason. It could be that his head wasn't screwed on just right. It could be, perhaps, that his shoes were too tight-"

Joyce gently set down her mixing bowl, she was in the process of making some fudge, and snuck to the doorway between the kitchen and the living room. El lay across the couch with her head on Will's knee. Jonathan sat composing his photos in an album. And Jim sat in the armchair, reading The Grinch aloud to them. El watched the man with wide eyes, taking in every word he said. More than likely this was the first time she'd ever heard of the Grinch. Joyce smiled to herself that he'd picked that book, after she'd called him the Grinch so often.

"Show her the pictures, Sir." Will requested and Jim turned the book's face to them, letting El see the illustration on the front to her. "Relax with the Sir stuff, kid." He encouraged before he went back to reading.

Joyce held her hands at her chest, watching the sweet little scene play out before her. She knew Jonathan hated The Grinch as he tended to be a little Grinchy himself, but he stayed in his seat, obviously listening in.

"The Grinch got a wonderful, awful idea!" Jim enunciated. "I know just what to do!" He said in a different voice, slipping in to character even if he didn't realize it, and adding a laugh.

El's eyebrows scrunched together as Jim read the misdeeds the Grinch was up too. "Bad man!" She whispered.

"Sort of. Just listen to the end of the story." Will encouraged. "Sometimes bad people are really just good people having a bad time."

After finishing with her fudge Joyce slipped into the living room, eager to be with her little family. She sat gently on the arm of the chair next to Jim and he laced and arm around her waist reflexively as he continued reading.

"And what happened then? Well in Whoville they say, that the Grinch's heart grew three sizes that day! And the minute his heart didn't feel quite so tight, he wizzed with his load through the bright morning light, and he brought back the toys! And the food for the feast! And he, he himself The Grinch carved the roast beast!"

The way Jim looked around at the kids when he finished reading turned Joyce into complete jello. She pressed a kiss to his forehead and laced her fingers in his.

"See El? The Grinch was a good guy after all." Will said, patting her shoulder. "He just took a little while to warm up to the Whos in Whoville."

"Like Hopper." Jonathan chimed in, drawing looks from Hop and Joyce.

"I'm stealing all your presents, kid." Hop responded.

## 11. Decorating Christmas Cookies

### Summary for the Chapter:

Jim and the kids find themselves in the middle of a bake off.

Jim wasn't quite sure what was going on. It had started around the first of the month when Flo placed a tin of homemade peppermint bark on his desk. Then Joyce sent brownies. Flo sent white chocolate covered oreos.

Jim was concerned about the growing tightness around his belt area. If the women in his life didn't stop this bake off soon, he'd have to order new uniforms.

Tonight's latest project was gingerbread men, and a gingerbread house for their own home. Joyce did all the baking and Will, with his artistic talent, did all the decorating. When Jim stooped to kiss Joyce, her lips tasted like sugar and cinnamon. "You been sneaking cookies on the side?" He asked innocently.

"Only from the disabled pile. Some didn't make it out in one piece." She said, gesturing towards a plate of still decorated cookies, missing various limbs.

"How are you sampling all your baking, and Flo's, and not gaining an ounce?" He asked earnestly.

"The key is to eat one or two, not four or five." She teased, leaving out the part that whenever he wasn't around, she did a few crunches and jumping jacks. Just in case.

He reached around her and retrieved a gingerbread man, missing both his legs. "Okay, one reject and I'm done."

"Nope, one more!" Will piped from his seat at the table. "This one too!" He passed Jim a cookie decked out in a police uniform.

"Kid, if I keep eating your Mom's cooking I won't be able to fit into my uniform anymore." He grinned, taking the cookie from the boy.

"This is spot on, Will."

"I'll decorate a few more like this for Powell and Callahan." He volunteered.

"I'll be sure they get them." Jim commented, cupping the boy's shoulder.

"What's your favorite dessert?" Joyce asked Jim. "Cake, pie?"

"Anything you make."

She rolled her eyes at him before smearing a bit of flour on his nose. "What was the favorite thing your Momma made you growing up?"

"You remember Momma's red velvet cake." He replied, thinking of that one Thanksgiving Joyce spent with him and his family when they were dating.

"Oh, I can't compete with that at all." She smiled, remembering his Mom's baking prowess.

"Well Mom's baking isn't the reason I'm getting fat." He teased and she dusted her hands on the dishtowel before wrapping her arms around his middle.

"Just makes you better to hug." She smiled.

He reached around her for another rejected cookie. "You said that was your last one."

"Relax, this one's for Cujo." He smiled, stooping slightly in her embrace to give the cookie to the dog.

.

Later Joyce called Jim back into the kitchen and pointed out the gingerbread house Will had finished.

Four cookies stood in front of the house. Two in what appeared to be dark coats, one wearing a skirt, and the fourth one in police uniform. Drawn with icing on the graham cracker fence was a dog. "Gang's all



here." She sniffled and he drew her close to his side, knowing she was about to cry. "Looks like Will's adopted you, wether you like it or not."

"I know. I didn't want to tell you, but before the parade he told me he wishes I were his Dad."

"I'm not surprised. You've done more for him than Lonnie ever did."

"I do what I can." He said softly and Joyce kissed his cheek.

"I love you, Jim."

"I know." He grinned.

## 12. An Unusual Snowman

### Summary for the Chapter:

The boys show Eleven some winter fun.

The boys all slid to a stop as they spotted Hopper at the Byers' kitchen table, nursing a cigarette and a cup of coffee.

"Hello Sir." They say, nearly in unison.

"Hey kids."

"Everything okay, Sir?" Dustin dares to ask and Lucas immediately elbows him in the ribs. "It's a valid question!" Dustin grumbles.

Hop has to hold back a grin. "Everything's fine. Just here on a social call." The three boys shoot each other a knowing look. "Will and El are in Will's room." Jim adds, eager to get them moving on and to stop silently judging him.

The trio makes their way down the hall and enters Will's room. Joyce makes her way back to the table and sits down next to Jim. "This town's tough. Even the kids are judging us." He teased, taking a drag of his cigarette and exhaling slowly.

"C'mon, the kids don't care." Joyce stressed, lighting up her own cigarette.

"You didn't see the looks I just got." He laughed as the group of five ran past then and out into the blinding white snow. From their places at the table Jim and Joyce watched the kids snowball fight.

Poor El got caught unguarded in the open, clearly no one had told her the rules of snowball fights, and got pelted with the initial round of snowballs before Mike ran out of cover to grab her and pull her behind Jim's truck, taking a few errant snowballs in the process. "He wouldn't have survived Vietnam with that kind of move. He went without ammo or backup." Jim observed, taking a sip from his steaming mug.

"It's sweet, how patient and protective Mike is over her." Joyce commented.

Jim smiled around the rim of his cup. "Add a pretty girl into the mix, and all the wiring in a man's brain changes. Some sort of instinctive urge to protect and serve kicks in."

"Not all." She said icily, not pleased that Lonnie showed up in her mind's eye.

"Any man worth a damn." Jim amended as she sipped her coffee.

The snowball fight ended, unclear to the watching adults who won, but Mike took El by the hand and lead her to an empty space in the yard where he unceremoniously flopped back into the thick snow. He scrubbed his arms and legs back and forth, making a snow angel. After a moment of discussion El followed suit. When he stood he took her hand and helped her up, pointing at the angel shapes they'd made. She smiled broadly under the knit cap she wore, her cheeks already pink with cold.

Will, wearing his hat that Jim gave him, started pointing and talking to the rest of the kids. Joyce wished she could hear him. Whatever project he was organizing, he was clearly in charge. Mike and Dustin began rolling snow and Lucas disappeared into the edge of the woods. El and Will both ran back to the house. "Whatcha doin kiddos?" Joyce called out to them as El ran to her and Will's room and he dove into the fridge.

"Building a snowman, of course! I had the coolest idea, wait till you see!" He grinned as he and El, her hands full, ran back outside.

"Aren't they doing this kind of backwards?" Jim asked as the kids rolled a slightly bigger snowball to stack on the smaller one. It became apparent when they rolled and even bigger ball of snow and Dustin and Mike struggled to place it on top. "Or upside down..." Joyce commented.

Will stooped to to poke the carrot nose into the snowman's face and

with a handful of stones that Lucas brought him, began drawing the snowman a face. It appeared the poor snowman was standing on his head!

Lucas gave him two sticks for arms, to make him look like his hands were on the ground but to also help brace the middle snowball a bit. Mike, stood on his tiptoes to place sticks in the biggest ball, taking Will's rain boots from El and positioning them just right.

"Hey Jonathan! Bring your camera!" Joyce called over her shoulder.

When the group stood back their snowman stood on his own on his head, booted feet in the air. "Well, I'll be damned." Jim commented.

"Who knew snowmen had feet, huh?" Joyce waved through the window to the kids, holding up a finger and hoping Will realized she wanted a picture.

Jonathan smirked as he squatted at the window, camera posed for a candid shot. "That's a most unusual snowman...." He commented just before the shutter clicked.

## 13. Impossible Presents

### Summary for the Chapter:

Jim can't decide whose harder to buy for, Jonathan or Joyce?

Finding a present for someone who is impossible to buy for

-----

"C'mon Joyce, he's your kid. Give me some ideas! I already gave Will something."

"I don't know Hop! Jonathan's kind of hard to buy for! I mean I usually just give him film."

Hop sighed. "This whole being Christmas-sy thing is hard. Been a long time since I had a family to buy for."

Joyce was taken by surprise to hear him refer to them as his family. "I mean, sort of. They're your kids but they're really good kids-" Hop stammered, trying to cover up what he just said. "I told the kids the other night that I wasn't part of the family and they corrected me-"

It wasn't often that James Hopper got flustered, but damn if it didn't turn Joyce on when he did. She silenced him with a kiss, running a hand through his hair. "More importantly, what did you get me for Christmas?"

He grinned and let his hand roam her side, painfully aware that both boys were home. "Nothing. You told me not to get you anything."

She scoffed. "You know when a woman says that, she doesn't really mean it-" He grinned and kissed her again.

"I know. I may not be the best boyfriend-" the words felt weird in his mouth now that he finally said them, "but I know better than to not give you anything. But I haven't gotten you anything yet. What do

you want for Christmas, baby?"

She thought for a moment. "I could use a new iron."

"I'm not buying you an iron for our first Christmas together."

"That's all I really need. Oh I know! Buy Jonathan a portable record player. You know, one of those suitcase style ones? He'd love that! The system he has is the only good thing he ever got out of his father-" Hop took her face in his hands.

"What do you want for Christmas, Joyce?"

"You." She grinned before kissing him.

"Careful what you wish for, woman." He growled into her ear before gently biting it.

.

When he left the kitchen he spotted Will eavesdropping. When Jim gave him a dirty look he threw up his hands. "I'm just trying to figure out what to give her!"

"She said she needs a new iron. C'mon, we'll go to Donald's and pick up a few things."

It being dark already, Will rode with his face to the window of the Blazer, watching the multicolored lights pass. "Isn't Christmas the best?" Will asked enthusiastically as Bing Crosby sang on the radio.

"Yeah, kid." Jim was busy thinking of where he could possibly hide the enormous present he was about to buy Joyce. Where could he hide that giant bear where she wouldn't see it? She stays at his trailer sometimes. She surprises him at work. She rides with him in the truck.

Jim grew sick of everyone side eyeing him. Obviously he and Joyce were seeing each other, but whenever he was in town with any of the Byers boys the whole town acted scandalized. Like it was any business of theirs if he wanted to spend time with Will or Jonathan,

or Joyce, for that matter. Will walked ahead of him in his brown Stetson and a heavy jacket that looked eerily similar to his own. Jim had the feeling that was more design than accident. It threw Jim off a little bit, watching a small version of himself walking ahead into Donald's. To anyone that didn't know any better, they looked just like father and son.

"Is this a good one?" Will asked, picking up the first iron he spotted.

"Good eye, kid. Let's go find your brother a record player."

"Woah!" Will's eyes grew wide at the sight of the giant bears at the back of the store.

"Uhhhh which one did she pick up the other night?" Jim muttered, looking over the multicolored bears. Brown, dark brown, white. "I think it was a white one." He said, pulling one from the bin.

"Who is that for, Chief?"

Jim turned to the boy and lay a finger across his lips. "This is official police business so you can't tell ANYONE, okay?" Will nodded vigorously. "This is for your Mom."

"It's as big as she is!" Will laughed.

"Exactly! She got really excited when she showed them to me, but she thinks they're too expensive." Jim shared with him. "So I'm buying her one. Good idea?"

Will looked down at the iron in his hands. "That's a much cooler present than a dumb old iron."

Jim thought about it for a little while. "I tell you what. We get the iron and give it to her anyway, because she needs one, but the bear can be from the both of us, okay?" Will's eyes lit up.

"Really?"

"Really."

"Thanks Chief! She's going to love this!"

.

After making their purchases, and enduring many awkward glances from townsfolk, Jim carried the giant bear out to the truck and managed to get it in the back seat.

"You should buckle him up." Will stressed.

"Kid, it's just a bear. He's soft."

"He's important. Got to keep him safe too."

Jim grinned. "If you insist." He reached across the bear and buckled it up.

"Where are you going to hide it, Sir?"

"Good question."

Running out of options, Jim decided to hide the bear in his office for now. He'd hide it better tomorrow, possibly in the ammo room, before Joyce popped in to have a smoke break or a quick lunch with him. "Stay here kid, I'll be quick." Jim encouraged, leaving the heat running in the truck. "I'll be back in five. No joyrides." He said, leaving Will grinning as he unbuckled the hulking bear and carried it inside the dark station. The things he was doing for this woman. He left it in his chair in his office. If nothing else, Flo will get a kick out of it in the morning when she made her morning rounds.

When he got back to the truck Will was sound asleep, his hat on the dash next to Jim's. The man slid into the truck carefully and turned the radio up a notch while Elvis was singing. He found himself singing along to the hymnal as he drove them back to the Byers' place.

He elected to leave the record player in the truck but he grabbed the bag with the iron before putting on his hat and stepping from the truck. Gently he put Will's hat on him and lifted the boy from the



truck, shutting the door with his foot and carrying the sleeping boy up the steps. Will shifted in his sleep and grabbed a handful of Jim's flannel. He knocked a few times with the toe of his boot and Joyce grinned as she let him inside.

He set a drowsy Will on his feet in the living room and Joyce spoke to him, encouraging him to go change and go to bed. He nodded sleepily and hugged his Mom. "G'night Mom-" he turned and regarded Jim with bleary eyes "night Dad-" and with that he was down the hallway and out of sight, leaving Jim breathless. He tried to swallow down the lump in his throat before Joyce looked at him but it was too late. She wrapped her arms around his waist and buried her face in his chest.

"I do believe he's as in love with you as I am."

Unable to comprehend with any of the emotions he was feeling, or she was pouring out, Jim reached beside him for the shopping bag and presented her with the new iron. She laughed and took it from him, an arm still wrapped around his back.

"I should get going-" he offered and she sat the bag down on the couch, wrapping both arms back around his middle and burying her face in his chest again, breathing in the scent of him.

"Stay the night, Jim. Stay forever."

## 14. The Smell of Christmas

### Summary for the Chapter:

Jim and Joyce spend some time talking about past Christmases.

Jim stood in the doorway with his eyes closed, breathing in the intoxicating smell. Pine, oranges, and cinnamon. How did she manage to make a house smell so good?

"How was work?" Joyce called from the kitchen. He came back to his senses and stepped out of his boots, hanging up his hat and coat. "Slow." He commented as he joined her at the table and observed the mountain of presents. "Looks like yours hasn't been."

She tied a ribbon and added another present to the stack. Jim glanced the tag out of curiosity. For Will. "Where's mine?" Jim play pouted.

"First ones I wrapped. I knew you'd stop by after work."

"First ones?" He inquired.

"Well duh. El and the boys got you something, I got you something." Jim hadn't expected the kids to get him anything, really. "By the way, thanks for the new iron. But I thought you told Will to get one for me." She said, implying that she'd overheard their conversation.

"Change of plans. Will helped me with your present, so it's from the both of us. If that's okay."

"You know I'll love anything you two get me. I love my new iron."

"Good, cause Will picked it out himself." Jim grinned as he stood to retrieve a beer from the fridge. The intoxicating smell was originating from a pot simmering on the stove. "Where do you get ideas for stuff like this, Joyce?"

"Magazines."

"When do you ever have time to read?" He teased, taking an armload of the presents and placing them under the tree. When he picked up one with his name on it he lifted it to his ear and shook it while she was watching him.

"Careful!" She teased, grabbing it from him and setting it under the tree.

She grabbed him by the hand and guided him to stand up. She pulled him to the living room and into the floor by the tree. "What are you up to?" He asked as she pushed the gifts aside, clearing a space under the tree. She lay on her back with her head under the it. He followed suit, so close their shoulders were touching under the edge of the it.

"Aren't the lights pretty from this angle? And the pine smell is so nice. Jonathan always looks at me funny when I do this, but it makes me feel like a kid again. I used to do this when I was growing up. Mom had a white tree, of course it was fake but she always made it so pretty. She always strung it with silver tinsel and these multicolored lights. Dad hated the silver, said it looked like gum wrappers." She laughed. "And when it got close to Christmas she and I would string together popcorn and dried orange peels."

Jim looked up into the tree and reached for Joyce's hand. "Sarah loved tinsel." He said. "When she was just crawling I came home from work one day to find she'd pulled all of it off the tree and was wrapped in it like a mummy."

Joyce laughed and squeezed his hand. "And what did you do?"

"Like any good father I put a bow on her head and carried her off to her mother." He laughed. "Then I fixed the tree. I never understood how something so tiny could cause so much destruction."

"Oh they can! Once when Will was about four or so, I woke up a week before Christmas to find that he had unwrapped every gift under the tree. The ones for both him and his brother and Lonnie and I. I just gave up and didn't rewrap anything. They were still surprised by what Santa brought them, though."

Jim grinned at the thought of Santa. "Sarah's third Christmas I got

suckered into playing Santa at the station. I tried to sneak in and change without her seeing but she met me at the door. I was so scared she wouldn't believe in Santa anymore if she thought it was me. But I got her to believe that since Santa couldn't be everywhere, he was at the North Pole making toys, that all the Daddies had to band together and help Santa out. I told her that was a Daddy's job, to make appearances for Santa. So whenever she'd see a Santa at the mall or something, he'd thank him for helping out Santa."

"That's adorable Jim!" Joyce gushed, wishing her kids had such a devoted father growing up. "My boys woke up Christmas Eve night one year because Lonnie was home drunk and bumbling around. He ended up falling and breaking his arm that year. The boys caught me putting 'Santa's' presents to them under the tree. So from then on they knew there was no Santa."

"So Santa stopped bringing them presents?" Jim asked.

"No, it became an inside joke to us, honestly. I made them swear to not to tell their friends, no need to spoil their belief in Santa, but my boys got presents from Mom Claus."

"That's amazing, Joyce. Mom Claus." Jim squeezed her hand. "I must admit, Joyce, I am enjoying this Christmas. More than I'd like to admit. Like, a sickening amount of enjoyment."

Careful not to disrupt the tree, Joyce rolled over until she was resting against his side. "I have a feeling this is going to be the best Christmas yet." She added before kissing the side of his face. "El's so amazed by everything to do with Christmas. With life, really. It's kind of refreshing. Seems like Jonathan and Will have had to grow up so quickly."

"But they're great kids, Joyce. Will is really something, to have gone through everything he went through and he's still so happy. Hell, considering what both boys went through."

"We all went through a lot. We all deserve a little bit of happiness. And my boys, and El, and you especially, are my happiness." Joyce said, kissing his nose.

## 15. Getting Snowed in Together

### Summary for the Chapter:

Hop and Joyce find themselves snowed in together with nothing to do (nsfw)

"Jesus Christ! Joyce! Are you okay?" His hands were on her in an instant, searching for any sign of injury. "Baby I'm so sorry!" He undid his seat belt and slid across the seat to her, taking her face in his hands and she kissed him, wide eyed with fear and so thankful they were both unharmed. The Blazer probably wasn't. They had skidded into a high snow bank and the white stuff covered the entire front half of the truck.

"Fuck. That must've been a patch of black ice. I swear I didn't see anything." He held her hands in his own, his thumbs tracing the fine bones under her skin. Their hearts still thumped in time, still full of adrenaline from their shared ordeal. Sighing, he switched the truck to life and tried to ease it out of the snowbank. When the vehicle refused to move he gunned it, and the tires slid, unable to grab any traction even with the snow tires and chains.

He sighed and tried calling out on the cb. At the rate the snow was falling, he figured none of the deputies could get out of the station, much less out to them. Flo affirmed to him that they were in fact snowed in at the station. The whole town was snowed in. "Great." He muttered. "As soon as he's able to get out and about, please tell Jesse that I'm stuck in a snowbank out near Prince street. Looks like I'll be spending the night out here." He'd been insistent that Joyce not drive home. That his truck was tough enough to get them to her house. And it had done just fine until that patch of black ice.

"The kids don't know where I am. I hope they're all home." Joyce fretted. Jim began shifting through the frequencies on the cb. More than once he'd stumbled across Will and his friends talking on their radios, he knew about what channel he'd find the boys on.

He found the boys, discussing something about El and comic books, and he cut in to let them know that Joyce had been snowed in and

couldn't make it home. For Will and Jonathan to keep El safe.

"Is she stuck alone, Sir?" Will asked.

"Nah kid, she's with me. You kids stay safe. Keep warm. If you need us, I'm on channel three. Over."

"Will do, Sir. Over." Will called.

Just before Jim switched the frequency to three Dustin could be heard telling his friends "Will, I bet Chief got snowed in with your Mom on purpose!"

"I can hear you, Henderson!" Jim growled, trying to hide his laughter.

"Sorry Sir!"

Jim ran the heater and the radio in the truck. Luckily he found a classic rock station, not everything was Christmas music. "I love snow, but this is bullshit." Joyce fretted, fidgeting nervously in the passenger seat. "How long until the gas runs out and we loose the heater? Won't it get cold tonight? Are we just supposed to sit here? How long until the tow truck can get us?" Not being able to see out of the windshield or either of their windows was freaking her out too. Made her feel like the snow was slowly crushing them. "We're just like sitting ducks here. We can't see if anyone's coming. What if another car slams into us?"

"Joyce, sweetheart." He grabbed her nervous hands and pulled them into his lap. "I've been on the roads all day, there's very little traffic. I tried to tell Donald to not even open today, but he wouldn't listen. I have half a mind to fine him for putting his workers in danger." Donald needed to be knocked down a peg for putting his Joyce in danger. "And I'll keep you warm, I promise. Would it make you feel better if we moved to the back seat, where you can see out of the windows? I've got a couple of blankets back there." When she nodded he freed himself of his gun belt, leaving it in his seat, and he gracelessly crawled into backseat. He lay it down flat and coaxed her into the back and into his lap where he wrapped his arms around her.

"Remember back in '67 when we went to that Rolling Stones concert in Indianapolis? I borrowed my cousin Ronnie's VW and we spent the night in the back of it in a Woolworth's parking lot." He reminded her. "Just pretend we're back in that lime green VW."

"You don't have any weed stashed back here, do you? I was less anxious in the '60s when I was smoking pot."

"I wish I did." He laughed. "But I remember one activity we did that night that we can reenact." He said as he brushed the hair from her neck and placed kisses there.

"Jim-" "What? You going somewhere?" He joked and felt her stiffen. "Relax baby, I'm just teasing."

She rolled onto the center of the seat. "I guess we do have a lot of time to burn. Come warm me up, Jim."

He didn't have to be told twice. In an instant he was over her, kissing her lips to her jaw and down her neck. He smiled against her skin when 'Green Grass and High Tides' began playing. One of his favorite songs. A long one, too. Her hands wound in his hair as he bunched up her jacket and shirt, smothering her torso with kisses as he worked to unbutton her jeans.

He wasted no time sliding into her. All the fear from the accident, all the worry drained from her face as he began to move in her. "That's it baby, just relax." He coaxed as he rubbed her hips. "It's just us in our own little winter wonderland." The windows of the Blazer fogged as he moved over her, rolling his hips into her as she called his name.

He rolled over onto his back on the seat, pulling her on top of him and letting her take control. "Jesus, baby." He moaned as she slid down onto him, establishing her own rhythm. His hand moved to her center when he rubbed lazy circles at her most sensitive with his thumb.

Their breaths were ragged in the warm truck, panting with effort. Her nails dug into his uniform shirt, grasping at the badge pinned to it. His uniform had seen a lot of action recently, she never was really good at resisting him in uniform. "Yes baby, right there!" He groaned

and grabbed at her hips.

"Yes, God!" She moaned, biting her bottom lip and driving him crazy. He pulled her forward against his chest as she moved, capturing her mouth in a hungry kiss. She began tightening around him and he could feel his heart pounding in his ears as he pulled at her hair. They came together, a tangle of limbs in the backseat as she collapsed, panting and gasping for air against his chest.

"We should get snowed in more often!" He laughed as he petted her hair, leaving little kisses along her forehead. She unbuttoned his shirt slowly, pushing up the henly underneath so that her hands had free access to his bare chest. Her fingertips traced little circles in his skin, making it prickle beneath her touch.

"I can't get enough of you, Hop." She admitted, kissing the center of his chest.

"I'm here any time you want to take advantage of me." He joked as his heart beat began to settle, coming down from the blinding high they were both on. "We got nothing else to do, ready for round two?" He asked, giving her a mischievous grin.

### **Notes for the Chapter:**

'Green Grass and High Tides' is by The Outlaws



## 16. A Christmas Letter

### Summary for the Chapter:

Joyce is having a mental health day and Jim's supporting her from afar.

### Notes for the Chapter:

okay so it's more of a love note. Good luck getting Jim to admit to it.

Jim hadn't seen or heard from Joyce all day. Usually she would have stopped by for a smoke break, or to bring him lunch so he wouldn't be running on doughnuts and coffee all day. On the days she didn't stop in she'd called. He found himself fretting when the end of shift came up and he still hadn't heard from her.

"She's hiding." Jonathan said nonchalantly, as if a grown woman hiding out was a normal occurrence.

"What do you mean hiding, kid?" Jim asked as Jonathan turned his back to him, busy with cooking dinner.

"You know it's Christmas time at the store and no matter how much she loves it, it wears her down. She throws herself so hard into the holidays that it wears her out."

"She's hiding out in her room, reading a book." Will chimed in. "She just needs some space."

Jim marveled at how grown her boys sounded, how accommodating they are of her needs.

"Is she okay though? It's unusual for her to just disappear." Jim asked.

"She was crying when she got home. I think she had a really bad day at work." Will added.

Jim's lips pressed into a tight line. "I guess it's better not to bother her, huh?"

"Probably not. She barely spoke to us." Jonathan replied. "She just needs a little while to recharge."

"Will, you got a piece of paper and a pen?"

Will passed him a sheet of sketchbook paper and a pencil, and Jim spent a few minutes scrawling in his frantic, uneven handwriting. He folded it over into the shape of a heart, a trick he learned back in high school to impress girls, and wrote her name on the front. "Here kid, give this to her for me, please. I'll see you guys later."

.

"Mom, dinner!" Jonathan sounded, knocking on her door.

He slid in the doorway carrying a bowl of beef stew, Will trailing behind with a can of Diet Coke for her, and a secret note tucked away in his pocket.

"Thanks boys. I'm sorry I'm kind of out of it today." Will reached over to hug her and placed the note in her hand.

At her questioning look he smiled. "Your secret Santa stopped by."

She waited until the boys left to open it.

.

Dear Joyce,

I always hated Christmas for years, until you. Your bright smile when you see Christmas trees. The amount of thought you put into picking out presents for everyone that you love. Your constant baking and how you taste like sugar cookies this time of year. How you religiously collect homemade ornaments for your tree and how your house constantly smells like pine. I love you, Joyce. You are my sunshine, even in winter. Take care of yourself, baby.

-Jim

A slow smile spread across her face and scooted to the edge of the bed, reaching for her phone to dial the number she knew by heart, but seldom called. Jim's trailer.

## 17. Falling Asleep by the Fire

### Summary for the Chapter:

It's a record cold snap and Joyce is sheltering half the neighborhood.

The sound of the phone ringing nearly made Joyce jump out of her skin. Who could be calling so late?

"Hello?" She asked shakily.

"Hey Joyce." She relaxed instantly at the sound of the gruff voice on the other end.

"Hey baby-"

"Not trying to be forward or anything, but can I stay with you tonight? The heat's out in my trailer."

"Of course! I mean, the heater's barely able to keep up here, but I'd be happy to share my warmth with you." He chuckled at the statement and heat rose up her neck to her face as she remembered them keeping each other warm when they were snowed into his truck.

"On your best behavior though. I've got a house full of kids."

"Sleepover?" He asked, looking forward to his own sleepover a little bit less now.

"Yup. The neighborhood boys."

"Henderson's been busting my chops recently, the little fart." He laughed. Besides Will, he always held a soft spot for Dustin. "Be over soon, sweetheart."

By the time Hopper appeared in her doorway, Joyce had the entire living room feeling cozy with the electric heater she'd invested in. One of the kings with the fake logs and fire. Jim stepped gingerly across the floor that was littered with unused sleeping bags. "We agreed to all sleep in the living room where it's warmest." Joyce

explained.

Tonight was a record setting cold snap for the winter so far and Jim agreed with her logic.

Dustin startled when his eyes landed on the Chief. He threw his hands up in a defensive motion. "I didn't steal those gnomes, I swear! I just hid them! Troy Harrington dared me!"

Jim rolled his eyes, wishing the gnome fiasco would just end. "You better watch your step, kid. You keep causing me grief with those gnomes and I'll be forced to haul you in."

He nearly laughed at the boy's exaggerated gulp.

Jonathan was the first to bed down for the night on their old couch where he often napped. Will, Dustin, and Lucas settled on the far side of the room in their sleeping bags. On the other side of the room Jim lay Joyce's mattress out, more than ready to climb into it as he yawned and stretched. Joyce insisted that El sleep next to her in Joyce's old sleeping bag. And Mike was allowed to sleep in the middle next to her, which Joyce pondered if that was a good idea or not.

Dustin was the first to knock out. His soft snores could be heard as the rest of the small crowd watched the Charlie Brown Christmas special. The rest of the crew sipped hot chocolate and munched popcorn as they watched. Or most of them anyway. Mike watched El tentatively as she was transfixed by the cartoon. He'd seen it a million times before, but watching her watch it for the first time was like experiencing it in a totally different way.

Jim held Joyce's hand, fighting to keep himself awake in the comfortable warmth. As the man in the crowd, he felt it his duty to fall asleep last. Or at least stay awake until Joyce fell asleep.

Lucas was next to fall asleep. Then Jonathan. After the movie ended El lay back and turned to face Mike, where he mirrored her action. He gave her a small smile and reached out for her hand, which Jim spotted, but pretended he didn't. As long as the kid kept it innocent,

he had no problem with it.

When Jim let out a mighty yawn Joyce grabbed him by his t-shirt, pulling him down into the pillows and under the thick flannel blanket. "Go to sleep already, you bear." She whispered as she clicked the tv off with the remote. She settled on her side facing him and he wrapped a protective arm around her, drawing her heat close to his chest.

"Goodnight, darlin." He whispered into the darkness before kissing her tenderly.

"Goodnight." She replied. He grunted when she burrowed her face into his neck, pressing her cold nose against his skin.

.

Will lie awake in the darkness, listening and watching the people around him. The light of the full moon shined in the window, illuminating the room in a soft glow. Dustin and Hop were unknowingly locked in a snoring battle, each inadvertently trying to out-snore the other. Lucas drooled on his pillow. Jonathan shifted in his sleep restlessly. Mike and El still held hands steadfastly in their sleep.

He leaned up a little to spot his Mom, wrapped in Hopper's embrace, and he smiled to himself. In the (mostly) quiet room he closed his eyes tightly and made a silent Christmas wish before he drifted off to sleep himself to dream of his family lying peacefully around him.

## 18. Dancing in the Snow

### Summary for the Chapter:

Hop drops in to make Joyce's night a little lighter.

"How did you get suckered into chaperoning?" Jim asked with a smirk from where he sat at her table, nursing a cup of coffee.

"Karen signed me up. Will you be my date or not?" She fumed, getting slightly upset that he was teasing her so much about this.

"Usually it's the boy that asks the girl to the dance."

"Forget it Hop! Geez, you can be such a shit sometimes!"

"Calm down honey, I'm just giving you a hard time." He said, giving her a sexy smirk that she wanted to either smack off his face or kiss it away.

"I would go with you to the Snow Ball in a heart beat, but I have to work." He frowned. "With all the traffic that'll be on the road that night, I've got to be there."

"I figured that would be the case." She pouted and he stood, moving to wrap his arms around her waist.

Their little moment was interrupted by El padding into the kitchen. At the look on her face both adults turned to her. "How do you dance?" She asked.

Joyce looked up at Jim. "This looks like a job for a man." She smiled and gestured towards El.

He stepped towards El and motioned for her to come closer, taking her hand and placing the other on her back. "Make sure his hand stays up here. No funny business." He said, making Joyce giggle.

Joyce stood back and watched Jim teach her with a small smile. "And make sure there's room between you. As they told me in school, leave room for Jesus." She said as Jim rolled his eyes at her.

"If Wheeler's hands roam I'll break em."

.

The next day Joyce stood in the school gymnasium, shifting uncomfortably from one high heel to the other. "Joyce! You looks so pretty!" Karen said, appraising Joyce's midnight blue shoulder-less dress. She herself was in a tight little red number, effortlessly beautiful as usual.

Joyce stood against the wall, like she had at her own school dances so many years ago, with a cup of punch. She watched her surrogate children in their various stations around the room. El and Mike dancing, a little too close for what Hop would consider appropriate. Lucas and Dustin manned the snack table. And Will stood shyly in a group of girls. It made her proud, watching her son mingle. His disappearance and reappearance brought him a bit of celebrity status and he was handling it a lot more gracefully than she would have. Even a whole year later he was still semi popular.

As Joyce watched them, El took turns dancing with Lucas and Dustin as well, laughing and clearly enjoying herself. Will danced with a few girls that Joyce didn't know.

.

Karen found her. "Hey you're needed outside."

"What for?" Joyce asked, looking out of the window to the light blanket of snow.

"I don't know, something to do with the traffic."

Joyce's brows knitted in confusion as she headed for the door. There were a few cars leaving early, but nothing that you could call traffic.

Jim stood against the outside wall of the school, exhaling smoke rings. At the sight of her he flashed her one of his signature sexy grins.



"Are you the traffic I'm supposed to attend to?" She smiled. "Sure am."

Seeing her shiver slightly in the cold air he slipped out of his bomber jacket, and she shrugged into it. It dwarfed her and made him smile bigger.

"I can't stay long. But I wanted to surprise you. Are you having fun?"

"Not really. You know social stuff always makes me nervous."

"Get in there and dance with your boy." Jim teased.

"His dance card is full, surprisingly."

Jim grabbed her by the waist and pulled her closer. His hand slipped to her back, his other taking her's. "Jim, what are you doing?"

As the next song began he started moving them about, dancing in the falling snow. "I can squeeze in one dance with my girl before I go."

She pulled him closer and lay her head against his chest, taking in the manly scent of him and the warmth of him. "Leave room for Jesus." He teased. He led her around slowly, taking into account she was in heels.

When she looked up into his face he kissed her, stopping and taking her face in his hands. "What if someone sees us?" She asked against his lips.

"I don't care. Let the whole world know I love you, Joyce. I'm tired of sneaking around like something's wrong here. There's not." He said with his forehead pressed against hers. "You're the only thing that matters to me, honey."

When she sniffled he kissed her tears. "Now now, none of that." He chided before he spun her around for one more dance.

"I've got to go back to work now, my sweetheart." He spoke softly into her ear. She slipped out of his coat and gave it back to him. Before he left he took her chin in his hand. "Have a better night, honey."

With a shy smile, she promised.

## 19. Last Day of Class

### Summary for the Chapter:

El has one more lesson for the boys on the last day of school.

"What's that?" El asked pointing at the wax leaves in the back of the empty box of Christmas decorations.

"Oh, mistletoe. It's not important. It's a silly tradition anyway." Joyce replied, setting the box onto the table.

"What's tradition?" El asked, stumbling over the unfamiliar word.

"A tradition is something that people do every year. Some are specific to the holidays, others to families."

"Mistletoe tradition?" El asked, retrieving the item from box.

"You hang it up somewhere and when people get caught under it, they kiss." Joyce explained and El's ears turned red, remembering her cafeteria kiss. She held it over her head and shuffled over to Joyce, kissing her cheek. Joyce laughed and wrapped an arm around her.

"Hang it?" El asked, passing the mistletoe to Joyce. "Right there." She said pointing to the archway of the entrance to the kitchen.

Joyce smiled to herself as she retrieved a chair and a tack, deciding that this more than likely had something to do with Mike Wheeler. "Keep it sweet, El. Just kisses on the cheek, okay? Hopper would have a coronary, otherwise." She laughed.

.

The boys came to Joyce's rowdy and full of energy, riding out a sugar high they had gathered through all of last day of school parties. El stopped them all at the archway, pointing upwards.

All four boys glanced upwards. "Tradition! El chimed, walking over to all of them and giving them each a quick peck on the cheek.

"You don't kiss everyone, El." Lucas laughed.

"Why not?"

"Well you only kiss people that are like, important to you." Dustin interrupted.

"You are important!" She replied. "All of you!" Unable to argue with her logic, the boys gathered around the table and began working on their homework.

.

Nancy and Jonathan were chatting casually as they stepped into the kitchen in search of sodas. El, the only one not entranced in homework, stopped them in the doorway. She pointed upwards to the mistletoe, drawing their attention upwards.

"Tradition!" She warned.

"El that's a lame tradition." Jonathan protested.

"Ah c'mon Jon. It's El's first Christmas. If she wants us to follow tradition, let's do it." She smiled before pulling him down so that she could kiss his cheek.

"Gross." Mike muttered under his breath.

"Shut up. You just wanna be under the mistletoe with El again!" Dustin taunted.

"Shut up Dustin!" Mike fussed as El stood and walked over to the two teens in the arch. With effort she stood on her tiptoes and kissed both Nancy and Jonathan's cheeks.

"Tradition!" She beamed.

.

Joyce buzzed around the kitchen, busy cleaning her kitchen around El and the boys as Jim stood in the open front door, kicking the snow

slush from his boots. He stopped again just inside the archway between the living room and kitchen, hanging up his hat and jacket.

El sprung to her feet and met him at the doorway. He gave her a puzzled look as she approached him, she never met him at the door like that. With wide eyes she motioned for him to come closer. She watched until he stood directly under the mistletoe.

"No." She said, asking him to come closer with a crook of her finger. He bent down, expecting her to tell him something, when she pressed a kiss to his bearded cheek. He smiled, taken aback by such an affectionate gesture.

"What's this about, kiddo?" He asked and she pointed above him.

"Tradition!" She said for the millionth time today. "Stay here." She said, placing hands on his wrists as if that would make him stay in place. She crossed the kitchen to where Joyce was oblivious to the scene and scrubbing a pot and grabbed her by the t-shirt, urging her to follow her.

"Just a second, El!" She protested, grabbing a hand towel to dry her hands on. When she followed the small girl El lead her to the archway, under the mistletoe and close to Jim.

"Tradition!" She repeated her mantra, pointing upwards.

Jim shrugged and gave Joyce a lopsided grin. "Can't argue with that." He added before taking Joyce's face in his hands and kissing her innocently, a sweet brush of his lips against hers.

"Just cheek kisses!" El warned and the boys laughed.

"Unless it's someone you like, El!" Dustin jeered.

"No, no, she's right." Jim smiled, leaning forward to peck Joyce on the cheek.

## 20. An Odd Tradition

### Summary for the Chapter:

After following traditions from both their families, Hop comes up with a new tradition for the Byer's family.

"Alright now to let them cool." Joyce said as she pulled the orange slices from the oven and set the pan on a hand towel on the bar.

She joined the boys and El at the table and picked up a needle herself, beginning a chain of popcorn. El was busy coloring a page Joyce had given her of a Christmas wreath. Christmas music played from the radio on the counter as the four chit chatted about their days at work and school. El, during the day while everyone was out, spent her days with Mrs. Wheeler and Holly. She was mid story about how she'd helped wrap presents for Mike when she was interrupted by a sound at the door.

At the knock Joyce turned and called "Come in!" It was cute how he still knocked, even though he basically lived there now. Jim performed his daily routine, stepping out of his snow caked boots, jacket and hat.

"Hello kids. Crafting hour at the Byer's house?" He asked.

"It's tradition!" El chimed her Christmas time mantra. Remembering her own rule she jumped from her chair and met Hopper under the mistletoe. This time he bent down without her asking and she kissed his bearded cheek again before bounding back to the table.

"She kisses all of us because we all matter to her." Will filled him in.

"Well that's adorable." Jim walked up behind Joyce and pressed the back of an outrageously cold hand to her cheek.

"Baby, it's cold outside!" He sang.

"Jesus!" She exclaimed, moving away from his cold skin. He laughed and pressed a kiss to her cheek before nuzzling his cold face against

hers. "Go sit by the heater and thaw out, you snowman!" He smiled and looked up at the boys and El, examining what they were doing. He took a seat at the table next to Joyce and she crossed her feet in his lap as she continued stringing. "So what's the deal with this? You do this every year?" He asked.

"Yup. I used to do this with my Mom. You spend time together making it and it looks nice on the tree."

Jim didn't exactly understand the point of it really, but he accepted it. "What's with the oranges?"

She stood and walked over to the pan of now cool orange slices and picked one up, poking a hole in it and stringing a red ribbon through it. "Ornaments. Aren't they pretty? Like little orange stained glass windows." She held one up to the light and admired it. "Orange was my mother's favorite color." She stood at the counter making the orange ornaments as the kids continued with their crafts. Jim sat smoking a cigarette as he shared crayons with El, casually coloring one of her coloring pages of a reindeer.

"Hey Jim, wanna be part of my tradition?" She asked, holding a bowl of the orange ornaments. "You wouldn't help me decorate the tree, but you can help me hang these up."

"Hey, I helped you put the star on. And then I let you decorate me." He said, standing and walking to meet her at the bar. Jonathan gave the pair an inquisitive look but then his features changed as he thought better about asking what the story was there. Jim took the bowl and Joyce's hand, leading her to the living room.

"Tradition!" El and Will both chimed as the pair went to cross under the archway. Jim and Joyce both laughed as he bent to kiss her. "They're onto us." Jim laughed against her mouth.

Once at the tree she reached into the bowl, taking one of the dried ornaments and placing it on the tree. "I guess I'll take the highroad." He remarked, reaching over her to place one up high on the tree.

"How was your day?" She asked as they worked in tandem, hanging the ornaments.

"Slow. Left me too much time to miss you." He remarked, stealing an opportunity to kiss her while she reached for another ornament. "How was yours?"

"Hectic. I'm glad to be home with my family." She said, her hand brushing his as they both reached for the same spot on the tree. Laughing, they hung the ornaments side by side.

.

After kissing again in the doorway as to not offend El, Joyce hung El and Hop's finished coloring on the fridge door. "Really, Joyce? Putting my artwork on the door?" He asked and she grinned. "But of course!"

"I was thinking, can we do one of my family's traditions?" He asked as the boys and El strung their popcorn creation on the tree.

"What's that babe?" She asked as she tidied up the kitchen.

"Let's go for a drive and look at the Christmas lights." He offered. "My parents did it when I was little. I think El and Will would really enjoy it." Joyce wrapped her arms around his middle, sliding her hands into his back pockets.

"Sounds like a wonderful idea. Hey kids! Go grab jackets, we're going for a ride." She called over her shoulder to them.

"You know, I was thinking of starting our own tradition...." He said before he explained to her something he had thought about earlier in the day.

.

Jonathan sat between the wide eyed children in the back of the Blazer, watching the looks of amazement on their faces. Especially El's. She sat wide eyed next to him, taking in the scene of every decorated house passing by her side of the truck. Jonathan tried his best to capture the wonder on their faces with his camera as Will pointed out the coolest houses to her. Joyce sang along to the



Christmas carols playing on the radio with Jim's hand on her knee as his eyes flicked to the rearview occasionally, watching the little family in the backseat.

"Think we should do it?" Jim asked. "You know, the whole new tradition? It doesn't sound too corny does it?"

"Are you kidding? As much as those two kids back there love waffles?" She whispered as he turned onto the open highway, intending to drive to the next town over.

"Where are we going?" Jonathan asked, realizing they were driving out of town.

"New family tradition." Joyce replied. "We practice so many of my family's and this one was Jim's, time for one that's all ours."

.

As he turned into the Waffle House parking lot El's face lit up once again. "Waffles!" A smile spread across Jim's face. He'd been thinking of El's love for breakfast earlier and hatched this plan.

"Waffle House is our new tradition?" Will asked.

"After dinner breakfast. Sound like fun?" Joyce replied and the younger children agreed in unison.

The family crowded into one of the booths and Jim ordered pecan waffles and bacon and hot chocolate for everyone. When he noticed Jonathan brooding at the end of the booth Jim retrieved his wallet and passed Jon a few singles, motioning at the jukebox. "Pick a few songs out for us, music man." Jonathan gave him a half smile as he stood.

The waitress brought their drinks and Jim lowly asked for extra straws. The waitress gave him an odd look but complied. While Joyce watched the cooks at the grill, Jim tore the end of his straw wrapper, blowing the end of the straw and sending the rest of the wrapper to hit Joyce's cheek. She giggled when she realized what he had done and retaliated, hitting him in the ear with hers. Having observed the

whole scene Will did the same, hitting El's nose and she laughed as she did the same, hitting Will's ear. Joyce and Jim surprised the children, blowing the wrappers from the spare straws at them. The kids moved to retaliate but instead pelted Jonathan when he returned to the table. Being left with only one shot of his own, he blew his straw at El. After a warning look from the waitress and garnering interest from the rest of the patrons, the kids gathered the wrappers and rolled them into little balls.

"Was this a good idea, or was this a good idea?" Jim asked through a mouthful of bacon. Joyce swatted his arm for talking with his mouth full but the group agreed with him as they ate. Afterwards he suggested pie and the whole table agreed, ordering their favorites.

Will, having realized El had never eat pie before, ordered them both chocolate. "You'll love it. Chocolate is the best thing ever!" He laughed and Joyce agreed heartily with him.

Outside the kids bundled into the truck as the adults stood outside, sharing an after dinner smoke and chatting idly. Jim decided to take the long way home, hoping to see more Christmas lights as they drove. Joyce made bets that El and Will would miss most of the anyway, as they would probably fall asleep in the warm truck with their bellies full. Jim agreed, ready to get home and to bed himself. Joyce slipped his hand into his. "You should spend the night, Jim."

On the way home Jim glanced in the rearview, catching all three of the kids asleep in the backseat. Jonathan with his head hung low and his arms draped over the seat and around his siblings. Both younger children lay asleep against his chest. Jim elbowed Joyce, who was on the verge of sleep herself, and nodded to the backseat.

Jim sat a little straighter in his seat, smiling when Joyce fell asleep with her head against the cool window.

## 21. Picking the Perfect Tree

### Summary for the Chapter:

Will helps Jim with a tree emergency

"Hey Sir. Mom's not home. She's at work." Will said into the telephone.

"Well, maybe you can help me." Jim replied. "I need your help on a mission, kid. Ever picked out a Christmas tree?"

"Why do you need a tree?"

"I keep forgetting to buy one for the station. If I don't buy one soon, Flo's gonna beat me up." He laughed.

"Sure, I can help!"

"I'll head over and get you. Leave your Mom a note that I got you, okay?"

.

Will and Jim walked through the trees, pointing out various ones to each other.

"Nah. Too short." Jim remarked about one.

"That one's huge!" Will remarked about another. "How about this one?" He asked, pointing to a tall, strong tree.

"Yeah, that one!"

Jim lightly pushed Will back out of the way as he shrugged out of his jacket and picked up the axe.

He was winded three swings in, but with two more mighty swings he fell the tree.

Will grabbed the tree attempting to drag it on his own and Jim laughed through his pants for air, stooping to help the small boy.

Later Jim drug a chair in front of the Christmas tree in it's corner, admiring the job Will and Flo had done decorating it. It didn't hold the homemade family charm that Joyce's did, but the store bought bulbs glittered with the strings of lights and it was pretty. "You guys did a really good job." He called over his shoulder to the pair.

Will sat down on the floor by Jim's knee. "I like the bulbs."

"Of course you do. You like glitter." Jim teased lightly. "I'm still finding glitter around here from the last tree. The stuff never goes away."

"A little bit of Christmas year round." Flo commented as she lay a hand on Jim's shoulder. "You two did a good job picking the tree. It's perfect."

"Will picked it out." Jim commented.

"Hey, one of these are for me!" Will said, spotting his name on a brightly colored gift under the tree.

"You can open it. It's from me." Flo offered and Will didn't hesitate as he grabbed the present and resumed his spot by Jim's knee.

When he tore through the Santa paper he found a remote controlled police car. He jumped from the floor and wrapped his arms around Flo's waist. "Thank you ma'am!"

Jim smiled at Flo's insight with the present. Will loved it. He also knew there was a tin of fudge under the tree for Jonathan, Joyce, and himself that he'd enjoy later. Jim Hopper would never admit it, but fudge is a weakness of his. And mama Flo knows it.

## 22. Obnoxious Singing Christmas Music

### Summary for the Chapter:

Jim and Joyce have a yuletide squabble.

Joyce scrubbed her countertops angrily, still angry with Jim. He refused to take time off at the station for Christmas.

"Look, Callahan just became a Dad!"

"And this is your first Christmas with us, Hop."

"This may be Powell's Mom's last Christmas. She's not in the best health. And Flo, god bless her, can't run the department and be a cop." He chuckled, drawing her ire. "She and I have spent the last four Christmases together."

"Are you trying to say you're picking Flo over me, Hop?" She asked, only half joking.

He sighed, going down on his elbows on her freshly wiped counter. He ran a hand through his hair. "I promise I'll be here Christmas Eve night, baby. And the night of Christmas."

"Can't you at least go in late Christmas morning, Hop? I mean Will wakes up at the crack of dawn Christmas morning. Surely there's no break-ins or murders on Christmas morning."

"You'd be surprised." He remarked, remembering his time as a cop in the city. "I'm a cop, Joyce. Your boyfriend or not, I still have a town to protect."

"Nothing, other than Will's disappearance, has happened in this town in how long, Hopper?"

"What if someone gets in an accident, Joyce? Or there is a break-in? Or someone else goes missing? You know I'm right, Joyce. I wish I could make everything peaceful for Christmas, but I can't. I'm a cop, baby! The Chief of Police!" With that he grabbed a magazine off of the coffee table and made his way to her room, slightly slamming the

door.

Jonathan and Will poked their heads out of their doors to look at her and she waved them away. "It's okay boys. Just a spat."

An hour later Joyce's anger had dissolved. He was right. His town did need him. Though she'd have to insist he wait to leave Christmas morning after her boys woke up. And he'd have to stay the night of Christmas Eve. She couldn't imagine her Christmas morning without him.

She stood with her hands on her hips, trying to figure out a way to apologize for being so bull headed. Struck with a sudden idea, she made her way to her bedroom. She heard the Elvis Christmas album playing before she got there. They both loved that album and it'd been played heavily so far. Towards the end of 'I'll Be Home for Christmas' she slipped into her door and locked it quietly behind her. He lay propped against her headboard, absorbed into his magazine with his reading glasses perched on his nose.

She loved those glasses on him. He looked so, paternal. More than once she'd called him Daddy while he wore them.

He didn't speak to her or look up at her as she walked passed him and into the bathroom. She'd change that soon enough. She pulled her t-shirt over her head and tossed it onto the floor, wiggling out of her jeans and adding them to the pile. She just so happened to be wearing her favorite bra and panties, a pretty dark blue lace set. Lastly, she grabbed her Santa hat from the mirror and pulled it on. When 'Blue Christmas' began, she slipped out of the bathroom and stood against the door, mouthing the words as Elvis sang.

"I'll have a blue Christmas without you. I'll be so blue just thinking about you." He didn't acknowledge her presence in the slightest, but she knew he seen her as she wiggled her hips in time with the song. "Decorations of red on a green Christmas tree. Won't be the same dear, if you're not here with me."

Jesus if the man didn't have an iron will. He turned the page in his magazine, putting all of his focus into it. If he wanted it that way, she'd just have to play dirty. She started at the foot of the bed and crawled towards him slowly, making sure he had a proper view of her breasts as she crawled into his lap, pulling the magazine from his hands and tossing it into the floor.

She took his hands and placed them on her hips as she straddled his lap, still lip syncing the song. "And when those blue snowflakes start falling, that's when those blue memories start calling. You'll be doin' all right, with your Christmas of white but I'll have a blue, blue blue blue Christmas." He sat up and kissed her collarbones, reaching around to unclasp her bra as he rolled her over to her back on the bed.

As his lips skimmed her neck he sang the last lines of the song. "You'll be doin' all right with your Christmas of white, But I'll have a blue, blue Christmas." He smiled as he freed her of her blue panties.

"I better get this kind of treatment when I come home from work Christmas night, baby." He smiled as his mouth found her breasts.

## 23. Traditional Holiday Dinner

### Summary for the Chapter:

Dinner's a little early in the Byer's household with their extended family.

"But it's not Christmas." Will protested as he sat the dinner table.

"Well this is the only day that I have off, and Jonathan and Jim will be home from work any minute now, so this is the only time we can sit down as a family and eat. We'll have leftovers to eat the next two days." Joyce explained.

El entered the kitchen in a light blue floral print dress. Joyce had insisted they dress nicely for the dinner and she admired Will in his dark blue polo and jeans and Joyce in her green knee length dress. "Pretty!" She said, looking from Will to Joyce.

"Thanks, you're pretty too, El. Isn't Will handsome?" She asked. "Boys are handsome. Girls are pretty."

"Handsome." El corrected herself.

At the knock on the door Joyce called for them to enter. Jim stepped through the door and performed his ritual, stepping out of his snowy boots before shrugging out of his coat and hanging up his hat.

"Handsome." El echoed herself, looking at Hop's white dress shirt, black dress pants, and red tie.

"You went home just to change?" Joyce asked, crossing the kitchen to kiss him under the mistletoe.

"Not every day I get invited to a fancy dinner."

.

Later another knock sounded and when Joyce and Hop welcomed them in, three figures entered. "Mom, I brought some guests if that's okay!" Jonathan called out as they slipped out of their shoes and



hung up their coats.

Jonathan stood in the doorway in his work uniform, holding hands with Nancy who wore jeans and a grey knit sweater, her hair down. Mike stood in front of her in a dark blue suit. El met him under the archway and kissed him innocently on the mouth. "Handsome!" She chimed as Mike blushed furiously.

"Hey hey hey, cheek kisses only, El!" Hopper called and she turned to him. "You don't kiss Joyce's cheek." He opened and closed his mouth several times, trying to come up with a good answer.

"We're older than you, sweetie. You can kiss Mike on the mouth when you're older, if he wants you too."

Nancy laughed as Jonathan left her side to go change. "When you're my age, El." She clarified.

"You guys aren't old enough either." Jim commented.

.

With everyone seated around the table, Joyce and Hopper shot each other a look. "None of us are really religious, but I feel like we should say some sort of thank you." Jim said.

"I think I can say we're all thankful for each other, right? And thankful for El joining our family." Joyce said and young people in the group all nodded.

Jim leaned next to him to whisper in Joyce's ear. "Thank you, for saving my life." He whispered to her as he cupped her face in his hand and kissed the side of her face. When the tears welled up in her eyes he laughed and brushed them away. "Don't mess up your makeup, sweetheart." He teased. "Let's eat, kiddos."

.

After dinner Jim stretched out across the couch, his pants unbuttoned and his shirt untucked. "I take it you liked dinner?" Joyce asked.

"Very much, sweetheart. I ate way too much." He laughed, crossing his feet on the arm of the couch.

El sat at the table, kicking her feet, as she ate another piece of red velvet cake and enjoyed Mike's company. Jonathan whisked Nancy away to listen to the latest record he'd bought.

Joyce lay on Jim's chest, full and lazy. "Did you really mean what you said to me? Earlier?" She asked.

"Joyce, I'm sleeping. I'm eating. I stopped abusing my pills. I only drink casually. I'm trying to be a better man for you. I owe you everything. You didn't have to, but you're holding my hand as I put myself back together. And that means everything, baby." He felt her tears wet his shirt and he stroked her hair. "Hey no crying on Christmas." He chided, rubbing her back.

"I love you, Jim."

"I love you too sweetheart."

## 24. Watching It Snow Alone/Together

### Summary for the Chapter:

Jim and Joyce are stuck at work, watching the snow fall, but their thoughts are on each other. Then Joyce watches it snow at home with her children.

Jim sits facing his window, watching the snowflakes fall slowly. He's secretly hopes that if Jack Frost decides to snow the town in, that he waits until later when most everyone is home. When he's home with Joyce. He wouldn't mind being snowed in with her again at all. A slow smile spreads across his face as he thinks about their busy night in the back of the Blazer. Her warm skin, her sounds and how she squirmed under his touch. How he managed to get her to come undone three times that night before he gave out. But more than that. How sometimes he managed to make her laugh so hard she would snort. How her eyes light up when he walks into the room. His thoughts shifted to her Christmas present. How in the hell was he going to sneak that big ass bear into her house tonight without her knowing? He was pondering that question as he reached for his lunch box. He noticed for the first time the note stuck to the front of it.

Do not share. I'm warning you.  
Love, Joyce.

Curious, he opened his lunch box. On top of the food she prepared for him lay the same lacy blue bra he peeled off of her during her rendition of 'Blue Christmas'. His cheeks burned at the sight of the racy secret. Joyce Byers, the minx.

Joyce stood outside the store, clutching a cigarette between her teeth. The amount of customers today was unreal for such a snowy day. It really shouldn't surprise her how much of Hawkins waited till the last minute to buy presents. She breathed a sigh of relief, thinking about being off tomorrow. From inside the store she could hear the Christmas music playing and she hummed along to 'The Chipmunk

Song'. That was always Will's favorite Christmas song growing up. As she watches the snow fall her thoughts drift to Jim. She smiles, wondering if he's had his lunch yet.

When Joyce makes it home finally the house smells amazing. Jonathan, Will, and El all smile at her from the kitchen where the table is already set. Together, the three of them had managed to make a meatloaf and a tray of brownies for dessert. Joyce hugged all three of them and kissed them (having to stand on her tip toes to kiss Jonathan). Jim had called and left her a message not to wait up for him, things had been pretty hairy in town with all the last minute shoppers in the deepening snow. Joyce frowned at the prospect of him missing this terrific dinner and having to go to bed without him, but she understood.

As the four of them ate they watched the snow fall. Joyce secretly wished it would snow them in tonight so that Jim couldn't leave in the morning. No one could cause trouble if they couldn't leave their homes, right?

"Mom, can you open a few presents tonight?" Will asked.

"You want me to open presents?"

"Just your ornaments, so we can put them on the tree tonight." He replied.

"Oh, alright!"

Will and El brought the small, brightly colored boxes to her as Jonathan gathered up the dinner dishes.

"Three?" She asked, counting the boxes. "One from each of us!" El replied excitedly.

Joyce opened each one slowly and deliberately, thanking each child and praising their creativity. Will passed her one last box, from Jim.

"You suckered Jim into making one?" She laughed and Will nodded.

"One from each of us." Will repeated. "Everyone in the family."

Joyce nearly teared up before opening it, just from Will mentioning Jim as family. Her boys were so accepting of the situation. At the sight of the beaded heart shaped ornament inside she really did cry. "I told him you'd cry." Will said, wrapping his arms around his mother.

Jim tiptoed into the dark house, peeking around to make sure the coast was clear before he pulled the giant teddy bear into the house behind him, kicking his shoes off as he did so. His presents for the kids lay under the tree already wrapped with the others, Joyce had done the wrapping for him, but there was no hiding this big boy. He cleared a spot by the tree and propped the giant bear by it, straightening the bow Flo had tied around it's neck for him. He stood back and smiled, ready for Joyce to wander sleepily into the living room and find it. Instead he padded barefoot down the hall to her room.

He was stripped down to his boxers in no time and sliding in bed behind her when she woke. "I thought you were never going to get home." She said sleepily as she glanced at the alarm clock. After midnight.

"Sorry baby. Merry Christmas." He said against her ear.

She rolled over to press her body against his chest. "Did you find your surprise in your lunch box?" She asked, grabbing his hand and moving it to her behind where he squeezed it gently in response.

"You're working your way to the naughty list, ma'am." He teased as her lips sought his throat.

"Let's be naughty then, Jim."

For the first time he noticed her blue negligee and his hands skimmed beneath it to find her wearing the panties to match the bra he'd found earlier.

"I get a blue Christmas after all." He smiled against her lips as she kissed him, tugging at his bottom lip. She squeaked as he rolled onto his back, pulling her to straddle him. His hands were all over her body as she struggled to free them of what little clothing there was between them.

## 25. Christmas Morning

### Summary for the Chapter:

Jim and Joyce have a very busy morning.

### Notes for the Chapter:

MERRY CHRISTMAS EVERYONE!

In the early hours of Christmas morning Joyce elbowed Jim in the ribs lightly, rousing him from his sleep. "Wanna play Santa with me?"

"Shit." He mumbled sleepily. "You can't go in the living room. There's something you can't see yet."

"Well go cover it up or something! I gotta put the kids' presents from Santa under the tree."

"Aren't they a little old for Santa?" He asked, rolling onto his back.

"Santa's never visited El. Now go cover up my present while I get their gifts!"

Jim stepped into his flannel pants and tiptoed into the living room, leaving her alone to find something to wear and retrieve the presents from the closet.

He caught sight of his heart ornament hanging proudly on the front of the tree and smiled. He wondered if she had cried like Will was expecting her to.

Looking around desperately, Jim grabbed the blanket from the couch and tossed it over the bear, pushing it down a bit so it didn't look so big. "Alright, c'mon!" He hissed down the hall and she appeared, her arms filled with presents and candy filled stockings.

"That's a big present, Jim." She said, noticing the blanketed mass.

"C'mon just hurry up will ya? I wanna go back to bed." He complained and she passed him unwrapped gifts to arrange under the tree.

Their deed done, he sent her back to the bedroom so he could uncover and stand the bear back up.

Back in their bedroom she emerged from the bathroom and sauntered over to where he sat on the edge of the bed. She climbed into his lap, wrapping her arms around his neck. "What do you say Santa? Wanna play a little bit more before we go back to sleep?"

"You're definitely on the naughty list, darlin."

"Then that means you shouldn't go easy on me, Santa." He grinned wickedly at her before pushing her back onto the bed.

He stood and walked over to the record player on her dresser, dropping the needle on the Elvis Christmas record and playing it softly.

"Enough with this wrapping paper." He said as he grabbed her sweatpants by the ankles, roughly pulling them from her as she lifted her hips to assist him. He kneeled over her in bed, working to pull off her shirt. "Have I ever told you that you're my favorite Christmas present?" He asked as he bit her shoulder gently.

The knock at the door startled them both. Jim blinked rapidly in the morning light as Joyce rolled off of his chest, stretching heartily next to him.

"Hey Mom, hey Hop! It's Christmas, c'mon!" Will called through the door.

"Be out in a second, baby!" She called, already up and retrieving her sweatpants and t-shirt from the pile of clothes on the floor.

Jim smiled at her naked form and smacked her ass playfully in passing to the bathroom. "Merry Christmas, babydoll."



"Merry Christmas, Santa baby." She replied, pulling on a shirt as he took a leak and observed his reflection in the mirror over the sink. Joyce tripped in her haste to get her sweatpants on, banging her hip against the dresser. "Shit!"

"You okay baby?" He asked as he rounded the corner, still naked. She tossed his pair of flannel pants at him.

"I'll have a new bruise to add to the ones you gave me last night." She said, already aware of the bruises on her bottom and thighs. He winked at her in response.

"That's what you get for being on the naughty list, Mom Claus."

.

All three children sat around the tree as Will divvied up the presents. As Joyce entered the living room Jim walked to the kitchen to turn on the coffee pot. Playing Joyce's Santa had taken up much of his night, but he wasn't complaining.

"James Keith Hopper!" She called from the living room before she met him in the kitchen, clutching the giant bear to her. "I told you these were too expensive!"

He smiled as he kissed her. "Only the best for my girl. Here's someone to cuddle up to on those long nights that I have to work." He said as he reached for the filters and the can of coffee. She wrapped her arm, the one that wasn't holding the bear, around his waist.

.

Will already had a mouthful of chocolate and was encouraging El to do the same. "You've never had a marshmallow chocolate Santa? They're amazing!" He mumbled through the food. El unwrapped one from her stocking and followed suit, stuffing the whole thing in her mouth as Will had done. Jonathan unboxed his new record player and shot Jim an appreciative glance. The kids sat amongst a mountain of new clothes and various art supplies and toys for the younger two.

Jim took stock of the new flannel shirts from the kids and his bottle of cologne from Joyce. He uncapped it and took a smell, understanding that she preferred it if he smelled like Old Spice. She sat next to him on the couch, between himself and the bear. But she was cuddled against his chest, radiating warmth with a broad smile. "Merry Christmas, sweetheart."

As the kids spent time with their new belongings, Joyce and Jim busied themselves with making cinnamon rolls, another new tradition they had thought up together. If there was ever a time for cinnamon rolls and hot chocolate for breakfast, it was Christmas morning.

The kids didn't have to be asked twice to come eat breakfast. Christmas music played over the radio as they all settled around the table. "Did everyone get what they wanted for Christmas?" Joyce asked as she picked up one of the sticky buns, pulling it apart with great care and licking icing off of her fingers.

"More than what I wanted. Everything is great." Jonathan said, speaking up first.

Eleven smiled broadly, unable to string together a sentence to convey just how happy she felt at the moment.

Joyce's eyes fell on her youngest boy when he didn't speak up. "Will?"

He shrugged. "There was one thing I wanted but it didn't happen. Maybe I'll get it next year."

"What's that honey?" Joyce asked, her face full of worry at the thought of missing out on a present.

"I wished for something important. If I tell you, my wish won't come true!" He protested.

"Then how are we supposed to know how to grant it?" She asked, genuinely curious.

"You don't have to know. It's something that just happens." He said smugly, proud that his mother was clueless.

Eleven looked at the clock on the wall above Jim's head. "Mike?"

"Easy El. We're snowed in. You'll have to see him when we can get out." He said, gesturing to the snow level with the windows.

## 26. New Years Eve

### Summary for the Chapter:

Things are shaking up on New Years Eve in the Byer's household.

El, Will, and Jonathan occupied the couch, eating popcorn and watching the night's festivities on the tv. Jim sat in the arm chair, legs splayed and laid back, lazy after a long day of work. He balanced a bottle of beer on the arm rest, forever grateful that Joyce hadn't dragged them all to Karen's New Years Eve party. He'd justified that it'd be nice to spend a quiet evening at home. That the crowd may be too much for El. And besides, who could miss Dick Clark?

"Hey guys, when you count down, make sure you keep counting. Okay?" He fumbled, the anxiety already rising in his system. He'd waited all month for this. Will and El nodded in response. "It's important." He assured them.

"Joyce! The countdown is about to begin!" He called to the back of the house where she was busy with something.

"I can hear it from here." She called.

"No baby, come watch it with us!" He called back, urgently needing her there for the moment. No way she was messing up his New Years Eve plans. "Please!"

"Jim! I'm busy! This is no different than last year."

The kids began their counting with the tv.

"TEN!" The countdown began and Jim sprang from his chair, rushing to the back of the house. The kids turned their attention from the tv and watched him with amused, but slightly confused faces.

"NINE!" "Just c'mon baby. It won't be a good New Year if we're not together." He justified as he rounded the corner to her room, halting the process of her sewing a pair of blue jeans.

"EIGHT!" She moved to take her sewing with her but he moved it from her hands, setting it on her bed. Growing impatient, he threw her over his shoulder and walked back to the living room. "Jim you goof!"

"SEVEN!" They were playing 'Take on Me' in the background and Jim gritted his teeth, hating that song. But he'd have to deal with it anyway. He sat her down and sank into the armchair. She sat on the armrest, reaching for his hand.

"SIX!" His heart hammered so hard in his chest he felt like the whole family could hear it over their yells. He could have a heart attack on the spot, right now. His mind flashed back to high school, making out under the bleachers when he first told Joyce he loved her. She laughed and wouldn't say it back, but she kissed him with a renewed vigor afterwards.

"FIVE!" Jim slid to the floor onto his knees, turning to face Joyce. Her face clouded with confusion as he fumbled in his pocket for the small gold band with the single diamond. His hands were shaking so hard he could barely hold it, but he managed to present it to her. "Will you-?" was all he could manage to get out.

"FOUR!" The kids said with much less conviction, watching the scene unfold in front of them. Joyce's hands flew to her face where she hid it. "Joyce will you marry me?" He managed to say. He decided that if she didn't say yes, he'd die on the spot.

"THREE!" "Joyce!" He called, reaching up to move her hands from her face. "Don't leave me hanging here." Her face was red and wet with tears.

"TWO!" She nodded covering her mouth with her free hand as he took her left hand, sliding the ring onto her finger. They both stood and he took her face in his hands.

"ONE!" The kids chanted with broad smiles as Jim bent down and kissed her hard, his heart hammering in his chest. The kids clapped and cheered around them, filling the house with noise as they kissed.

"I love you so much." He mumbled against her lips as they parted.

"I love you more." She replied.

He sat back in his armchair, pulling her into his lap as she cried. He petted her hair, pressing little kisses to her forehead. The kids sat in stunned silence on the couch.

Will's voice was small when he finally spoke. "Can I be a Hopper too?"

Jim brushed his eyes with the back of his hand, touched by the question. And Joyce sniffled, her hand back over her mouth.

"I always hated being a Byers." Jonathan added.

"There's nothing I want more in the world, boys." Jim replied, his voice cracking. Joyce found his hand again and threaded her fingers in his, giving them a tight squeeze. Will crossed the room to fall against Jim's chest, hugging him tightly.

"Now I have everything I wanted for Christmas!" He informed the couple.